

What is Americanism?

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7 /4/ 1999

What is Americanism? A broad definition may well refer to it as a custom, characteristic, or belief originating in America. But if the scope must be narrowed, one might ask: "what custom, what characteristic, and what belief?" Voluminous facets of theories have been propounded and argued to the limit that guaranteed it's consummation similar to the historian schools. Might there be a single trait to define Americanism? A theory was proposed by me during one of the historian conventions. According to the Split Personality of Americanism theory, Americanism is defined as a constant battle between Jeffersonian idealism against the Hamiltonian practicality. The theory further explains the nascence of Americanism beginning from the advent of John Smith, nourished by salutary neglect, and blossoming into the American Revolution. Although Americanism reached it's fundamental format by the period of the Revolution, it was not until the rivalry between Jefferson and Hamilton that the wings of the eagle would stiffen to fly through the philosophies of America for the next two hundred years.

Influenced by the philosophies of John Locke, Thomas Jefferson believed that the Revolutionary War was fought for the freedom of the people and the defense of principles. Jefferson binds himself with the implacable denotation of democracy. A government in which the governed hold the ruling power and, to Jefferson, farmers were synonymous with the mass population. Vernon L. Parrington, a progressive historian, praised Jefferson and wrote:

That Jefferson was an idealist was singularly fortunate for America; there was need of idealism to leaven the materialistic realism of the times. It was critical period and he came at the turn of a long running tide.

This ideal of a libertarian America became one of the first natural laws of Americanism: that all man are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights; that government is instituted among men; and that whenever any form of government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to abolish it. This ideal of Americanism was foreshadowed through Bacon's Rebellion and manifested through the Revolutionary War, Shay's Rebellion, the

Whisky Rebellion, and the college rebellion during the Vietnam conflict. To a certain degree, Jefferson was justified in his crusade of liberty. It certainly had a dramatic effect upon posterity. But calling his idealism Americanism would be incomplete without acknowledging what Jefferson was quite ignorant of, Hamilton's fiscal talent.

Instead of John Locke, Hamilton revered the economic studies of David Hume. To Hamilton, the Revolutionary War was fought as a social and economic phenomenon that emphasized material interest. The Revolution was an excuse to set free the economic desires and social aspirations through political struggle. There is no doubt of Hamilton's financial ability. He was a true genius. A man of penetrating intelligence with an exuberant flow of energy, combined with a passion for meticulous work. He could accomplish massive amounts of work with little effort or time and, as noted in *The Federalist* Period, "was willing to take responsibility, make arrangements, oversee details, and anticipate contingencies." This ability was paramount to the accomplishment of a new government. Hamilton knew exactly the precise element of success, the support of the upper class. With this premise, Hamilton set up the first Bank of United States. It was a plan that would involve \$2 million of United States government investment while taking \$8 million from private investors. With investors' own gold in the game, the public would inevitably desire to see the success of the new government. If this aspect of Americanism was to be named with courtesy, it is capitalism. The word "greed" perhaps would suit it better to describe the owners of the New England mills, as well as the professional athletic stars of today.

Financial ambition was among the first quibbles to ignite the conflagration. It started with the foreign relations of America with both England and France. Hamilton greatly admired the political structure of England while Jefferson had Anglophobia. During his mission in Paris from 1785 to 1789, Jefferson engrossed himself with reducing the trust that Great Britain had created. He intended to expand trade relations with France, along with other European countries. By doing so, he believed that the merchants of America would reduce their dependency on England and, therefore, hinder any form of English monopoly. To Jefferson's astonishment, his four years of toil in France would soon be obliterated by Mr. Hamilton's "financial octopus", and the tariff. Contrary to Jefferson's aspiration, Hamilton sought to prosper American trade through the aggrandizing Anglo-American relationship. Hamilton delved as far as to sabotage John Jay's visit to Great Britain, which ensued the abhorred Jay's Treaty. Like a child spoiled by George Washington, Hamilton was

bound to get what he wanted. An unbalanced compromise was eventually reached with Hamilton through the building of America's capital. Jefferson endured this retreat for the price of peace, a transient realm awaiting for the beginning of a endless revulsion in the future.

If Hamilton's financial establishment contradicted Jefferson's, their theories of financial flow worsened the situation. By supporting the rich, Hamilton believed in the trickle down system while Jefferson trickled in the opposite direction. To Hamilton, society was built in a form of a pyramid. The upper class merchants resides on the top while the lower class farmers took the bottom. By supporting the top of the pyramid with the law of gravity, financial stability would eventually trickle down towards the base. This federalist system of suppressing the poor imbued itself so deeply into Americanism that companies such as NIKE continue the practice today. On the contrary, Jefferson believed that since government exists through the consent of the governed, the wealth should therefore be aimed towards the most populated area, the bottom of the pyramid. America today "proclaims" to be this side of Americanism. A goal of Thomas Jefferson during the eighteen century is still battling the capitalism of Hamilton.

Neither Hamilton nor Jefferson was wrong in their particular concept of establishing the future America; but rather incomplete and different. It is this divergence of vision that set both men on the road to rivalry. There is no surprise in the development and formation of the two party system due to this philosophical variance. This idea of a two party system also rooted itself into Americanism that exists today.

While the followers of Hamilton claimed to be the Federalists, the adherents of Jefferson became the Republicans. These two sides, according to the theory, became the symbolic split of personality within Americanism. Hamilton on one side, symbolized the North, merchants, the upper class, monarch government, pro-Anglo-American relationship, and capitalism. Jefferson, on the other hand, symbolized the South, planters, the lower class, democratic government, Anglophobia, and idealism. The conclusion of the theory states that Hamilton was the brain of Americanism, while Jefferson was the heart. The quarrel between Jefferson and Hamilton shaped the basic structure of most impact on America. Indeed, many lawyers today still quote the works of Hamilton, while other lawyers ironically contradict their arguments with Jeffersonian ideas. There is considerable evidence to support this theory of split personality. Capitalism is still fighting against idealism, the rich against the poor, and the North against the South. America resurfaces the past through the passage of time. Jefferson would, in another form and time, battle

against the means of Hamilton. It is these ideas set from the beginning of our nation that would later become the principle, and “ism”, of America.